

I-17 project will add capacity, interchanges

Michael Clancy

The Arizona Republic

Jun. 8, 2007 01:30 PM

Work has gotten under way on improvements to Interstate 17 between Loop 101 and Carefree Highway.

The result will be a freeway with more capacity and more interchanges.

Included will be what planners expect will be major improvements to Phoenix City Councilman Dave Siebert's least favorite interchange.

The junction at Happy Valley Road, with its six-entry circular roadways at the tops of the exit/entrance ramps, has been a nightmare.

Siebert drove the point home on Tuesday at a policy session of the Phoenix City Council, held at the four-month-old North Gateway Transfer Station's recycling facility.

Just getting to the meeting posed a problem for some attendees because of the roundabouts. The road to the transfer station is the freeway frontage road, which meets Happy Valley in the roundabout.

Steve Beasley, the Arizona Department of Transportation's project manager for freeway improvements between Loop 101 and Carefree Highway, addressed the council after Tom Callow, senior executive assistant to the city manager, said no freeway "is in more need of improvement."

Callow called I-17 the "last rural freeway" in Maricopa County, mainly because of the 5-mile span between the Happy Valley and Carefree Highway exits.

Beasley said work began this week on the stretch.

When finished, drivers will find a high-occupancy vehicle lane and an additional general purpose lane in both directions on the freeway, as well as new interchanges at Jomax and Dixileta roads. Beasley said he hoped the \$300 million project, which already is under way, would have its first phase completed by the end of 2009.

Most noticeable to the public, besides the additional lanes, will be:

- A full interchange at Jomax Road, north of Happy Valley Road, at a cost of \$35 million. It should be ready by late summer or early fall of 2008.

- A half interchange at Dixileta Road, north of Jomax, at a cost of \$17 million. Ramps would be constructed on the south side of Dixileta, enabling local drivers to go south on the freeway or for northbound drivers to exit there.

- At Carefree Highway, an increasingly busy interchange, a partial cloverleaf would be built. No cost was given. The interchange serves both Lake Pleasant-bound travelers as well as developments mostly on the east side of the freeway. The cloverleaf sections, on the north side of Carefree Highway, would serve travelers heading north on the freeway who wish to go west on Carefree, and for those heading west on Carefree who want to go south on the freeway. The interchange should reduce congestion in left-turn lanes at the top of the current exit ramps.

Beasley said the roundabouts at Happy Valley also would be altered as frontage roads are turned into one-way routes, leaving only four ways into and out of them.

Doug Nintzel, ADOT spokesman, said the roundabouts will work better once traffic is relieved by the additional interchanges. He said they already are effective at moving traffic, because before they was built, exit traffic often backed up on to the freeway.

Preparations also are under way for two other interchanges, at Lone Mountain Road and Dove Valley Road, Beasley said. Those intersections will be built during later phases of the project.

Also later, additional lanes will be built from Carefree Highway to Anthem Way, helping reduce some of the congestion caused by the Anthem development in New River.

Most of the first phase, he said, would be finished by 2010.

Two lanes of traffic each way would remain open during construction, he said, with some possible exceptions.

Timothy Tait of ADOT said the work would prove inconvenient for motorists.

"The next couple years will be pretty rough going on Interstate 17," he said.

The area along Interstate 17 north of Loop 101 has grown rapidly over the past few years, with several new developments going up just west of the freeway in the area.